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**Research Talk – All Welcome**

**Wednesday 14 February 2024, 3.30-5pm**

**H14 (with online joining option\*)**

Merchiston Campus, 10 Colinton Road, Edinburgh EH10 5DT

**Dr Richard Ashby**

**(King’s College London)**

**‘Shylock and the Resentments of Jean Améry’**

Chair: Dr Georgina Lucas

Abstract:

Nothing could seem more ‘natural’ than the desire to overcome lingering resentments and achieve peace and understanding after a period of conflict and violence. This desire for reconciliation aims at rehabilitating the perpetrators and, at the same time, pacifying the victims, so that society may ‘move on’, ‘forgive and forget’, and ‘leave the past behind’ in a spirit of amity and humanity. What about the victims, however, who refuse to be ‘pacified’, to ‘forgive and forget, to ‘move on’ and ‘leave the past in the past’? For many victims of conflict and injustice, reparation, reconciliation, and forgiveness can seem a burden, a form of ‘pressure’ which is brought to bear by a society that is all too eager to overcome its violent past, as opposed to properly reckoning with it.

This paper sets out to consider that burden as it was suffered by Austrian Auschwitz survivor and essayist, Jean Améry. Améry defends his right to preserve his resentments about the past in his 1962 essay ‘Resentments’, where he critiques a dubious culture of forgiveness, reconciliation, and ‘overcoming’ in post-war Germany and Europe. This unforgiving defence of resentment caused Améry to identify with a Shakespearean figure that, in post-Holocaust culture, was profoundly taboo: Shylock. Twice in ‘Resentments’, Améry compares himself to Shylock. Shylock is something of a paradox for Améry. Améry saw in Shylock an antisemitic stereotype, the ‘archetypal’ unforgiving and resentful Jew. But remarkably, he embraces that stereotype and makes it his own.

I will show that, by identifying with the resentful Shylock, Améry sets himself against shallow discourses of forgiveness and reconciliation prevalent in post-Holocaust culture. I will also show, however, that it is precisely by preserving his resentment that Améry sets the scene for an authentic reconciliation between perpetrator and victim, a reconciliation that has its basis in penal justice as a socially instituted form of ‘revenge’. This is part of his renegotiation of enlightened, humanist ideals in the wake of the Holocaust. If the degradations perpetrated in the Holocaust had put paid to traditional humanist ideals about self and society, Améry attempts in his writings a dialectical recovery of the human, which he (re)locates in thoughts and actions that would seem to be markedly ‘unenlightened’, retrogressive, and even anti- or inhuman. Most of all, Améry looks for the human in resentment and revenge, in the (in)humanity of Shylock.

Speaker Biography:

Dr Richard Ashby is a British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the English Department at King’s College London, where he is working on his project, ‘Shakespeare and Holocaust Writing: Testimony, Literature, Philosophy’. He is the author *of King Lear ‘After’ Auschwitz: Shakespeare, Appropriation and Theatres of Catastrophe in Post-War British Drama*, which was published by Edinburgh University Press in 2021. He is also the author of various articles on Shakespeare and his afterlives, which have appeared in *Shakespeare Survey*, *History Today*, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, *Comparative Drama*, *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, *Adaptation*, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, *Textual Practice*, and *Shakespeare*. Forthcoming publications include a chapter on exile in Primo Levi and *King Lear* and an article on Jean Améry for a special issue of *The Shakespeare International Yearbook*. He is also currently organising a conference and edited collection on the theme of Shakespeare and the Holocaust, as well as public engagement activities on Shakespeare and Holocaust memory with the Australian performance maker Deborah Leiser Moore and the British artist Tom de Freston.

**\*For online joining option, please contact the organiser:**

**Professor Anne Schwan (a.schwan@napier.ac.uk)**